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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000169

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: UNION OF KYRGYZ MUSLIMS -- ISLAMIC AWAKENING OR
STALKING HORSE?

REF: A. A. BISHKEK 120

[1](#)B. B. 06 BISHKEK 1354

[1](#)C. C. BISHKEK 156

[1](#)D. D. BISHKEK 155

BISHKEK 00000169 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: When Tursunbay Bakir uulu and Nurlan Motuyev announced the formation of the Union of Kyrgyz Muslims in November 2008, analysts were puzzled by the odd partnership. Bakir uulu is a serious, publicly devout former Ombudsman, while Motuyev is best known for seizing a coal mine in the aftermath of the 2005 "Tulip Revolution." Kyrgyzstan's Constitution bans political parties established on the basis of religion, and it bans political activity by religious groups. Bakir uulu claims that the Union is neither a political party nor a religious organization, but rather a "public organization," with the aim of providing "constructive opposition to the government." A number of commentators have criticized the group for mixing religion and politics, and others have raised concerns about possible foreign funding of the group. Motuyev's past ties with the Bakiyev government and the government's potential support of Bakir uulu as a diversionary Presidential candidate may indicate that the Muslim Union is a government-created stalking horse, aimed at siphoning support away from the traditional opposition. END SUMMARY.

Defining the Union

[1](#)2. (SBU) When Tursunbay Bakir uulu and Nurlan Motuyev announced the formation of the Union of Kyrgyz Muslims in November 2008, analysts were puzzled by the odd partnership. Bakir uulu is a serious, publicly devout former Ombudsman, while Motuyev is best known for seizing a coal mine in the aftermath of the 2005 "Tulip Revolution." Kyrgyzstan's Constitution bans political parties established on the basis of religion, and it bans political activity by religious groups. Bakir uulu claims that the Union is neither a political party nor a religious organization, but rather a

"public organization," with the aim of providing "constructive opposition to the government." In late November, Bakir uulu and Motuyev completed a tour of cities in southern Kyrgyzstan, claiming to have spoken to 80,000 people.

13. (SBU) In their public statements, Bakir uulu and Motuyev claim that the extremist Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir is "conquering" southern Kyrgyzstan and the eastern Issyk-Kul region, and characterize their approach as an appeal to moderate Islam to fill the void into which Hizb ut-Tahrir is, they assert, expanding. Both spoke out in favor of closing Manas Air Base (Ref A). They have also demanded that the government purge holdovers from former President Akayev's administration, and "the end of family-based rule," which is the closest they have come to publicly criticizing the government. Their highest profile event to date -- a January 14 protest against Israeli actions in Gaza that drew approximately 30 participants -- ended with their arrests when they attempted to burn an Israeli flag on Bishkek's main square. They were charged with disobedience to a police officer, and released with a fine of 500 som (about \$13.)

Bakir Uluu's New Agenda?

14. (C) Bakir uulu served as Ombudsman from 2002 to 2008 (in which capacity he worked constructively with the Embassy on human rights issues, Ref B), has run for President twice, and served in Parliament from 1995 to 2002. Toktogul Kakchyekyeyev, a political analyst and retired militia colonel, suggested to Poloff that Bakir uulu has strong ties to international fundamentalist Muslim groups, which financed

BISHKEK 00000169 002.2 OF 002

Bakir uulu's 2005 Presidential campaign and whose funding may have been the main motivation for Bakir uluu's creation of an Islamic party. Kakchyekyeyev said that Bakir uulu met with Taliban leader Mullah Omar in Afghanistan in 1999, but added that Bakir uulu is opportunistic, rather than a true believer. Regardless of Bakir uulu's claims to represent moderate Islam, Kakchyekyeyev believed that Bakir uulu could easily move to the camp of the extremists. He said that the Muslim Union is "a serious business," and that they have significant support in southern Kyrgyzstan.

What's Motivating Motuyev?

15. (C) Nurlan Motuyev, the other half of the Muslim Union, is known as the "coal king" of Naryn after his short-lived seizure of a mine during the turmoil of the "Tulip Revolution." Motuyev has previously organized pro-Bakiyev demonstrations, staged a one-man protest against Manas Air Base (in which he claimed the Base was "bombing Muslim countries -- Afghanistan and Iraq") and offered the Embassy an explicit video of opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev (Ref C). Also, in the summer of 2008, Motuyev requested a U.S. visa to attend custody hearings in the U.S. regarding his American citizen children. After his visa request was denied due to ineligibilities for crimes of moral turpitude and misrepresentation, then-Presidential Chief of Staff Medet Sadyrkulov called the Embassy on his behalf. (Motuyev subsequently threatened to work single-handedly to close Manas Air Base until he was issued a visa.)

How Others View the Muslim Union

16. (C) Commentators have criticized the Muslim Union for mixing religion and politics, both because they say it is contrary to Islamic doctrine, and because it may change the previously wholly secular nature of Kyrgyz politics. Mars Sariyev, a widely quoted analyst, said that the mass of Muslims "has reached a critical size," and that there are "masses of lumpens who are just waiting for a clarion call,"

which might be provided by this new party. However, a press report cited a self-identified Hizb ut-Tahrir member who minimized the group's appeal to Muslims. He said that on their country-wide tour, Bakir uulu and Motuyev did not attract masses of Muslims to hear them speak; they just went to the places where Muslims had already gathered.

Comment

17. (C) In numerous meetings with the Embassy, political observers have declared themselves mystified by what the Muslim Union is trying to achieve, and why Bakir uulu would link himself politically with Motuyev. Post has seen no indication that the public efforts of this pair have generated any particular resonance in Kyrgyzstan's Muslim community, or, contrary to Kakchyekyeyev, that they represent the beginning of an extremist Muslim awakening in Kyrgyzstan.

Given Motuyev's past ties with the Bakiyev government, and a recent report that the government may support Bakir uulu as a Presidential candidate in order to split the opposition (Ref D), it is possible that the Muslim Union is a government-created stalking horse, aimed at siphoning support away from the traditional opposition, and perhaps also aimed at drawing potential Muslim activists out into the open.

GFOELLER